

## Commonly Asked Questions About Generics<sup>1-3</sup>



Prescription medications can be a big part of your health care costs. Using generic medications may help control some of these costs. Not only are generics safe and effective, but they are usually less expensive than brand name medications. The following are answers to some common questions about generic medications.

### **What is a generic medication?**

Generic medications are generic versions of brand name medications. All medications have a generic name, but not all are available as a generic. That is because new brand name medications are typically protected by a patent. When these patents expire, generic medication manufacturers can apply to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to begin making generic versions of off-patent brand name medications.

### **Are generic medications as effective as brand names?**

Yes. Generics are copies of brand name medications that have been fully tested and FDA approved. A generic medication is the same as its brand name counterpart in the following ways:

- Active ingredient
- Dosage
- Safety
- Strength
- Quality
- How it works
- The way it is taken
- How it is used

## Why should I use generic medications?

Many people prefer generics because they save money. A generic offers the same benefits as a brand name medication, but typically at a much lower price.

## Why are generics less expensive?

Many factors are part of medication prices. A major reason why generics often cost less than brand name medications is competition in the marketplace. Each brand name medication is usually made by just one manufacturer, but more than one manufacturer can make a generic version of a brand name medication. When many manufacturers make the same generic, that usually lowers the price of the generic medication.

## What is the difference between a generic equivalent and a generic alternative?

A **generic equivalent** is the generic version of a brand name medication. If a generic equivalent for your brand name medication is not yet available, ask your doctor or pharmacist if a generic alternative may be appropriate. A **generic alternative** treats the same condition as a branded product, but is not the generic equivalent of that specific brand name medication. Although the generic alternative has a different active ingredient than your brand name medication, both are similar in the way they work.

## Isn't it up to my doctor or pharmacist to decide if I should get a generic medication?

Yes, to some extent it is. But letting your doctor and pharmacist know you're interested in using generic medications could help you save money. Many generics are available to treat:

- High blood pressure
- Pain
- Dyspepsia (indigestion, heartburn, low-grade reflux)
- Diabetes

## What should I do if I'm interested in reducing my costs?

Any discussion about medications should start with your doctor or pharmacist, and using generics should be a joint decision. If you're interested in lowering your out-of-pocket costs:

- Make a list of the medications you currently take and review it with your doctor to see if generic equivalents and/or alternatives are available
- When your doctor prescribes a new medication, ask if any appropriate generics are available
- Tell your pharmacist you prefer to receive generic medications whenever possible

## How can I start saving on my prescription medication costs?

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about your generic choices every time you fill a prescription. You may be able to reduce your out-of-pocket costs by using generic medications. To learn more about generics you can contact the FDA's Office of Generic Medications:

7500 Standish Place  
Rockville, MD 20855

Phone: **1-240-276-9310**

Email: [genericmedications@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:genericmedications@fda.hhs.gov)

Website: **[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)**



## References:

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